

Opportunities for spouses are numerous

By Linda Laws
Community relations advisor

So you have just arrived. Things are very different. Your spouse is working long hours, and you are not sure just how to go about finding out what's what and where things are in this new country.

Let me try to help.

There are certainly many opportunities to get involved with community organisations. Whether it's further education, volunteering, working or making the most of the opportunity not to work for a while, there are things out there to do.

Newspapers

One of the most useful sources of information you can tap into in the community are local newspapers, particularly if you are living off-base. In addition to all the local news, they provide information on what's going on in the area, details of job opportunities and a details of rented properties.

Ones to look for are "The East Anglian Daily Times" and "Eastern Daily Press" covering the whole of East Anglia; "The Bury Free Press," "Newmarket Journal," "Thetford and Watton Times" covering their own specific areas, as the titles suggest.

Quality national papers include "The Times," "The Daily Telegraph" and "The Independent" and any one of these is a good way to find out what the current issues are. Also, over the weekends they produce papers with many sections to cover news, reviews, travel, finance and the arts (all the current London and many provincial shows, new cinema releases and book reviews).

Newspapers can be bought from shops called "newsagents" and they can be found in villages – sometimes part of the local store – and towns, as well as cities. Some offer a newspaper delivery service to your home for a small charge. There are also a couple of large national newsagent chain stores – W. H. Smith and John Menzies.



For more information about living in Britain, call me at Ext. 3145.

Learning opportunities

Adult education can be undertaken as a series of short courses, one-day seminars or weekend seminars, or on a full-time basis. Many universities have links with smaller colleges in the area for certain learning programmes – and for distance learning.

If you don't want to pursue a purely academic course, many of the local learning institutions offer courses on a variety of subjects – a great way to learn a new skill you always wanted to do but couldn't because of work commitments. A college year is from September (October for universities) to June or July. It consists of three terms (semesters). Prospectuses are distributed around August each year for classes starting in September. Local newspapers always carry details.

Local councils

Another good source of information are councils. Our immediate local council area is Forest Heath. The council is called the Forest Heath District Council. The areas covered include Newmarket, Brandon, Lakenheath and Mildenhall. Councils adjoining Forest Heath include South Norfolk Council, St. Edmundsbury Borough Council and East Cambridgeshire District Council.

Official guides are produced by councils and give good information about their local area and the services provided by the council and usually include town maps. Some handy numbers: Forest Heath District Council – Tel: (01638) 719000; South Norfolk Council – Tel: (01508) 533633; East Cambridgeshire District Council – Tel: (01353) 665555.

Working in the community

If there are no restrictions in your passport, you will be able to compete for jobs on the economy alongside other candidates. Many spouses do work on the British economy.

Newspapers, as mentioned before, are a good way to find out about job opportunities. There are also recruitment agencies to help place you in the right organisation – some specialise in particular job areas while others are generalist agencies.



Photo by A1C Grace Hunt

David Bassey, family support center career counselor, guides someone in making a career decision.

We also have "Jobcentres" to help people find employment. It is a government agency and local employers use them to place vacancies (newspapers are not always the only source to advertise jobs). The local Jobcentres are based in Mildenhall and Newmarket.

Note: The Family Support Centre provides assistance in preparing your curriculum vitae for the British job market, and can give hints on ways in which to present yourself at interviews. Call them at Ext.3847.

Volunteering

Volunteering is an excellent way in which to get to know your British neighbours. British libraries have details of all voluntary organisations in their local area. A visit to your local community library should be a first step to decide which organisation you would like to help.

There are many to choose from and all areas are covered – caring organisations for old people, young people, environmental groups, animal sanctuaries etc.

To give you some idea here are a few names: The Wildlife Trusts (most counties have one, so look for Norfolk-Suffolk or Cambridgeshire), Victim Support (an organisation working closely with the police and which helps victims of crime), The Samaritans (who give help to the suicidal, lonely and despairing). Some town centres have charity shops who are often looking for volunteers to man them.